

Remarks at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars Gala

Remarks

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Secretary of State

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Oh my goodness. Well, I am incredibly touched and grateful and a little embarrassed by the extraordinary outpouring of very kind words this evening, starting with Fred Malek, who I greatly appreciate for reminding us that we're all on the same team, namely the American team, and my longtime friend Mack McLarty and his wonderful Donna. I am grateful to all of you.

I want to thank Christine for that introduction, but more than that for her leadership at the IMF, for her extraordinary strength and vision in these uncertain economic times, and for her very steady hand as she is trying to help lead us through them.

I also want to thank all the member of Congress and the diplomatic corps here tonight. It is very good seeing a lot of my former colleagues getting, to sit with my friend, Susan Collins.

And of course, I want to, along with all of you, salute our host, Jane Harman, one of our nation's most articulate, thoughtful leaders on foreign policy and national security. And now as president of the Wilson Center, she is still shaping public debate. (Applause.) And in addition to that, she is advising a lot of us and helping to make sure that the scholarship we need for better informed decisions is being done. She provides insights and counsel on a great range of issues.

And I loved the fact that Jane was just referencing that, under her leadership, the Wilson Center has become the home of the Council of World Women Leaders, the only organization of current and former women heads of state and ministers. They are working together with the State Department and others to organize a summit in the United Arab Emirates on women's leadership in the Arab world.

And Jane joined me last December at the State Department to launch the Women in Public Service Project to identify, train, and mentor emerging women leaders around the world, founded in partnership with the Seven Sisters Colleges. Jane and I are both proud graduates, she of Smith and I of Wellesley, and we are including many international and domestic partners. And I think it's exciting that we are working on these kinds of things together in addition to all of the raft of difficult problems, both those in the headlines and in the trendlines that we confront every single day.

I have to say, that film was hilarious. (Laughter.) And I have a feeling that Jane was stage managing every bit of it, but I can't wait to see all my predecessors to thank them for participating. And George Shultz, with his Don't Worry,

Be Happy song – he actually gave me a little bear that I keep in my office that has one of these buttons. When you press it, it sings, “Don’t worry, be happy.” (Laughter.) So I mean, I figured if it’s good enough for George Shultz, it’s good enough for me. So I was thrilled to see him sharing that with all of you tonight.

And the thing about Henry Kissinger is, with that accent, he can anything and you’d think it’s really smart and witty. (Laughter.) And so he and I have had some of the most amazing conversations, but I’m never quite sure I’ve understood everything that was said. (Laughter.)

But for me, the men and women you saw on the screen have become great friends, whether I knew them well, like I did, of course, with dear Madeleine Albright, or knew them from afar or by reputation at events like this. All of them have been extraordinarily helpful to me, and I’m very grateful they would come together to be part of this evening.

Well, I know it’s been, for me, a reunion. I’ve had a chance to see so many of-- a lot of my friends and colleagues over the past evening. And I want to make just a few serious points, because you’ve been very, very patient.

I think as both Jane and Christine suggested in their remarks tonight, we are very fortunate to be in the positions we’re in in today’s world, and we’re very pleased that in our own ways we can be trying to help chart our path through what is a very difficult, dangerous, tumultuous time, as the film seemed to suggest. And we’re trying to look at economic policy and foreign policy in new ways, because the problems really demand that.

When you think about it, a flu in Canton can become an epidemic in Chicago. Or a protest in Tunisia can reverberate through Latin America to East Asia. Or when a housing bubble bursts in Las Vegas, it can unsteady markets in London and Mumbai.

The world has changed. The amount and velocity of change is breathtaking. Technology and globalization have made our countries and our communities interdependent and interconnected. And citizens and non-[state]actors like NGOs, corporations, or criminal cartels and terrorist networks, increasingly are influencing international affairs, for good and ill. So we face these complex challenges that are cross-cutting, that no one nation can hope or expect to solve alone. So how we operate in this world must obviously change.

When I became Secretary of State, people were questioning if America was still willing to shoulder leadership. It’s not hard to remember why: two wars, an economy in freefall, diplomacy deemphasized, traditional alliances fraying. The international system that the United States had helped to build and defend over many decades seemed to be buckling under the weight of new threats.

And so what we’ve tried to do in the last three-plus years is to make sure we shored up and secured America’s global leadership, knowing full well that it was going to take more than

military solutions. We needed to be sure we were using every possible approach: breaking down a lot of the old bureaucratic silos; engaging not just with governments but with citizens, this new citizen empowerment from the bottom up; finding new partners in the private sector; harnessing market forces to really be part of the solution to some of the strategic problems we face, leading by example and bringing people together on behalf of supporting universal rights and values.

We really were having to rethink how we did business, business in government as well as business in the private sector. Now, in the government, we're calling what we're trying to do smart power. And it, at bottom, was an effort to integrate diplomacy, development, and defense. And I was so privileged to find allies not just among my colleagues who were former secretaries of state, but in the Pentagon. Both Secretaries of Defense Bob Gates and Leon Panetta and Chairs of the Joint Chiefs Mike Mullen and now Marty Dempsey have really been advocates for the idea that diplomacy and development could help prevent conflicts and rebuild shattered societies that would, in turn, lighten the load on our military.

And so together, we are making sure our soldiers, diplomats, and development experts are working more closely together, are listening to each other, are contributing to being part of an all-hands-on-deck, whole-of-government approach. And we're also trying to make sure we get our bureaucracies in Washington trying to do the same.

By next January, when I will have traveled, I guess, a million miles or more, I will look back on this period as one that has been a great privilege and honor to serve. But I will also know that we have a lot of work to do. And when I came into this office, I knew that we were going to have to confront a lot of difficult problems. I'll just quickly mention a few.

One, Iran's nuclear activities. How were we going to confront what was a clear threat? How could we unify the international community so they were not either on the sidelines or actively trying to undermine our diplomatic efforts?

So what we did was to first decide we had to give diplomacy a real chance. And President Obama extended an open hand to the Iranian people. In our public diplomacy, we used every channel, from satellite TV and Twitter, to old-fashioned snail mail. We cemented our partnership with European allies. We reengaged with institutions like the International Atomic Energy Agency. We convinced the entire Security Council, including Russia and China, to enact the most onerous sanctions that ever had been and to keep up the pressure.

And then we added to that through our unilateral sanctions and the EU sanctions. We worked directly with banks and insurance companies to make sure those sanctions were implemented. Iran's tankers now sit idle; its oil goes unsold; its currency has collapsed. The window for engagement is still open, and we are actively pursuing a diplomatic solution. But we know that we have to continue to demonstrate that we're making progress diplomatically. It's too soon to know how this story will end, but the fact that we've returned to the negotiating table makes clear the choice for Iran's leaders.

We're also looking for how to operate multidimensional diplomacy at all times. Building and holding a coalition to pressure and isolate Iran is one example, but there are others as well. Our willingness to engage showed good faith. Our willingness to listen showed humility. Our willingness to hammer out the kinds of solutions that would be acceptable beyond the usual suspects who always are with us is paying off. It's not just with China and Russia, but other rising powers like India, Turkey, South Africa, South Korea, Indonesia, and Brazil, where intensive diplomacy is absolutely essential.

Aligning our interests with these rising influential nations is not always easy. And in Syria we're seeing firsthand how difficult it can be. But it can and has been working. Iran is one example. But we're also trying to come together around other global challenges, from working with the IMF and others to manage the international economic crisis to securing loose nukes.

We're also putting a lot more attention into regional and global institutions that mobilize common action and help to settle disputes peacefully, that stand for upholding universal rights and standards; and supporting an open, free, transparent, and fair economic system; and having security arrangements that promote stability and trust.

Because I don't believe that the rise of new powers has to be a threat to American leadership. In fact, the rise of these powers is, in part, the result of American leadership – of the stability and prosperity we brought to and fostered around the world since the end of World War II. This is not 1912, when friction between a declining Britain and a rising Germany set the stage for global conflict. It's 2012, and a strong America is working with new powers in an international system designed to prevent global conflict. But we have to update that system. We have to continue to ask ourselves, "How can we make it work better?" And we cannot do it alone.

Let me also turn to a second example. Early last year, when citizens took to the streets across the Middle East and North Africa demanding their dignity, their human rights, those protests caught fire and caught most people by surprise. We saw the beginnings of responsiveness and accountability in Egypt and even in Yemen. But in Libya, Qadhafi responded with brutal violence, and the Libyan people and the Arab League, for the first time together, asked for the international community's support. So we did put together a broad coalition, led by NATO with a mandate from the UN Security Council. Think about it: The Arab League not only called for action, but members of the Arab League participated alongside NATO. Without America's high-level diplomacy, cajoling, hand-holding, and occasional arm-twisting, that coalition would never have come together or stayed together.

And now we're working with new partners to support emerging democracies and to help build credible institutions. I was just in Brasilia with President Dilma Rousseff co-chairing the Open Government Partnership, which is an effort by the United States to bring countries into the fight against corruption, a push for openness. And I was so proud that Libya was represented at that conference and made a speech about the kind of future – democratic future – that they are seeking.

Now, we all know that this is a difficult transformation. And we see countries like Syria that are trying to hold back the tide of history with brutal, horrible impact on innocent lives. But a situation as complicated as the Arab Spring demands a multifaceted response. And so we have to marry all of these tools together: old-fashioned shoe-leather diplomacy and the use of social media, using every partner that is willing to work with us, and bringing disparate stakeholders together. Only the United States of America has the resolve, the reach, and the resources to do this on a truly global scale.

And that doesn't mean we go it alone. Actually, it means the opposite. America cannot and should not shoulder every burden ourselves. As we saw in Libya, our European and NATO allies remain our partners of first resort, but new partners like those Arab nations that flew the air CAP and helped with the maritime interdiction really made a difference.

So we have to work on how we keep building those networks and how we give capability and credibility to these coalitions that come up to promote regional stability and security in a lot of hotspots. And we've paid particular attention to the Asia Pacific and the multilateral organizations there to building new architecture of institutions that will serve as a bulwark for continuing security and prosperity, and to deal with disputes like the territorial disputes in the South China Sea.

Because after all, the Asia Pacific region, which stretches from the Indian Ocean all the way to shores of the Americas, is a key driver of global politics and economics. So we are engaging in a wholehearted way. We are working on new trade agreements, educational exchanges, an updated military force posture. We're looking to bring leaders together from across the Asia Pacific.

And just recently, last September in San Francisco, we had a gathering for part of the preparation for the Asia Pacific Economic Community meeting in Hawaii. And we talked about something which I have talked about for a long time but which is really getting traction now. And that is improving women's access to capital and markets, building women's capacities and skills, supporting women leaders is important – not just because Christine and Jane and I are women, but because we know that the more women participate in economies, the more successful those economies will be. (Applause.)

So we're working all the time on the full range of issues. And you've been very patient tonight and very, very kind – my friends who have bought tables to support the Wilson Center and to come and be here this evening. And I wanted to just give you a short overview of why we believe that this kind of full engagement on all levels in our diplomacy and development work is the only way for us to move forward together.

So as I look now at the work that the Wilson Center is doing and will be doing, I am encouraged and grateful because there are no doubts in my mind that we need this public/private/not-for-profit partnership. The government can't do it alone; business can't do it alone; civil society can't do it alone. We need to be sure that we are all on the same side and, in my view, all on the same team.

And I was thinking a lot about this because we're coming up on the anniversary of the raid that killed bin Ladin, and there will be lots and lots of wall-to-wall coverage about it. And it was an incredible moment for me because of the extraordinary personal commitment that I felt. People have asked me all the time, "What was going through your mind on that day?" And really, what was going through my mind were all the people in New York that I served and represented and what they had gone through, how much they and our country deserved justice.

And I thought about how important it was to make sure we did everything we could to protect ourselves from another attack. And I certainly thought about those brave Navy SEALs who went out on that moonless Pakistani night. But I also thought about how important it is that we don't just focus on the threats, we don't just focus on the dangers; we have to keep reminding ourselves of the opportunities and the necessity for American leadership. It's in our DNA. It's who we are. And everyone in this room already knows, so it is a little bit like preaching to the choir.

But we have to keep telling that story. And I want to end where Fred began the evening. I love politics because I think it's the way people resolve problems and issues between them. And it's not just electoral politics that counts. If you've ever been in a church, you know about politics. If you've ever been on a faculty, you know about politics. But electoral politics, which is the lifeblood of our democracy, is something that our country has been doing for longer now than anybody else in the history of the world. And we have to set an example as to how it's done.

That doesn't mean we have to always agree with each other, because we will not. But it means we have to show what it means to work together, to compromise. When I go to Burma, as I did at the end of last year, and I go to their new shiny parliament building and I meet with these people who are trying to figure out do they really want to try this

thing called democracy, and they ask me, "Can you come help us know how to have a democracy," I realized that our ultimate strength, as it always has been, rests in our values: who we are, what we represent. We can't ever lose that.

So we will need the help and partnership of everyone here. We're grateful for the Wilson Center, which is a wonderful resource for a lot of the work that we do. But mostly, we'll need citizenship to push and hold accountable our leadership, regardless of party, regardless of whether it's in government or business, to make sure that we never, ever lose what makes our country so special.

When I get off that plane representing the United States, I am so proud and so honored, and I want to be sure that whoever is the secretary of state next and next and next for 20, 30, 50, 100 years into the future will always be viewed with the same level of respect and appreciation for what this country stands for. And I need to be sure that all of you share that mission as well. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

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